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News Release

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Ontario's doctors make five recommendations to improve long-term care

TORONTO, Jan. 13, 2021— Ontario's doctors call on Premier Doug Ford to act quickly to combat forecasts there will be more deaths in long-term care homes in the current pandemic surge than in the first wave.

Long-term care residents account for 60 per cent of COVID deaths in Ontario. Since Jan. 1 alone, 198 long-term care residents and two staff have died of COVID-19.

Ontario's doctors have five recommendations for Premier Doug Ford:

1. Increase efforts to vaccinate all long-term care residents and caregivers, including health workers, personal support workers, other staff and relatives who provide physical and mental health support.

At the same time, continue to provide COVID-19 testing for long-term care homes – including rapid-care tests – so that they and public health officials have real-time data to prevent and-or manage outbreaks.

2. Cut the red tape preventing physicians from moving rapidly into long-term care homes with outbreaks or other significant needs.

At the same time, value all LTC employees and caregivers and provide support such as paid sick days. Personal support workers and others should not have to choose whether to go to work to earn money for food and rent or stay home to prevent the spread of the virus.

In the short term, speed up training of new PSWs including retraining people who lost jobs in the service industry because of COVID.

3. Continue the use of virtual care in long-term homes to prevent the spread of the virus and improve access to specialists, in conjunction with in-person care where appropriate, especially in homes with outbreaks and where patients are in declining health.

Virtual care also helps LTC residents receive more timely care and limit unnecessary trips to the hospital or community medical clinics.

Financial investments may be needed to ensure that all physicians and long-term care homes, especially in northern and rural areas, have reliable internet service and devices on which to receive care virtually, and that homes have sufficient staff who are comfortable with and fluent in technology to assist residents receive care by phone, tablet or video device.

4. Appoint a chief medical officer for long-term care for each Ontario Health region to ensure the best quality care is being provided, by, for example, co-ordinating efforts between the acute and long-term care sectors, liaising with Public Health and co-ordinating physician coverage over multiple sites.

5. Shift social attitudes so that caring for frail older adults is considered to be one of the most important jobs in the world.

“The situation in our long-term care homes is dire and heartbreaking,” said Dr. Samantha Hill, president of the Ontario Medical Association. “We appreciate the steps the government has taken and continues to take. But we all know more needs to be done and done quickly.”

CEO Allan O'Dette said the OMA looks forward to the final report of Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission. “We can't wait to take more steps now. We urge Premier Doug Ford to act on some of

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